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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BAKU 000362

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [ECON](#) [ASEC](#) [KDEM](#) [PHUM](#) [PINR](#) [AJ](#)
SUBJECT: PRESIDENT'S DECREE GIVES GREATER POWERS TO NEW
MINISTRY OF EMERGENCY SITUATIONS

REF: A. BAKU 184

[B](#). 05 BAKU 1922

[C](#). BAKU 217

Classified By: Amb. Reno Harnish for reasons 1.4 b and d.

[1](#)1. (C) SUMMARY: On February 27, President Aliyev issued a decree detailing the activities the new Ministry of Emergency Situations (MES) will undertake. In addition to the broad responsibilities outlined by the decree establishing the Ministry (ref b), the new decree called for: creation of a militarized special guard service under the MES; permission for MES officials to undertake criminal investigations; creation of a hotline for the MES to respond to catastrophic emergencies; and transfer of responsibility for the ships and wharfs under the "Caspian Specialized Emergency and Rescue, LTD" to the MES. In a separate decree, President Aliyev also transferred to the MES the responsibilities of the former State Agency for City Planning and Architecture and established a new State Committee for Urban Construction and Architecture. This move likely signals stripping the "Old Guard" Baku mayor of his highly lucrative "urban planning" responsibilities and transferring that authority to Heydarov, a close friend of the President. With these two new decrees, Heydarov seems to be emerging as one of the most powerful individuals in Azerbaijan. END SUMMARY.

BROAD EMERGENCY RESPONSE CAPABILITIES

[1](#)2. (C) A February 27 presidential decree outlined in more detail the power and responsibilities of the new Ministry of Emergency Situations, headed by former Customs Chief Kemaladdin Heydarov (ref a). The broad transfer of power to the new ministry appears to bring to fruition the predictions Heydarov made to Ambassador (ref c). The appointment of troops to the Ministry came as a surprise to the general population, and some observers expressed concern that yet another ministry will be able to undertake criminal investigations, including searches. Officially, the decree defines the responsibility of the troops as organizing security of enterprises, facilities, and other strategic objects which are vulnerable to catastrophes, disasters, fires, and terrorist attacks. As previewed to the Ambassador, this language suggests the troops will take over not only civil defense operations, but also pipeline security and probably some counterterrorism responsibilities. However, we are not clear what the boundaries will be between the MES and other investigative bodies, such as the Ministry of National Security and the Ministry of Internal Affairs, particularly as the MES now has a role in terrorist activities.

[1](#)3. (C) The "Caspian Specialized Emergency and Rescue, LTD", which was transferred to the MES in the same decree,

previously was in charge of all security, search and rescue, and emergency operations for anything that moved on the Caspian Sea. However, we have been told that the company was ineffectual in its mission, a mission that ordinarily would reside with the Azerbaijan Coast Guard. Placing the search and rescue operations under the MES is logically consistent, but also could provide financial benefits for the new Minister. With this additional mission, the MES will be able to purchase and build new ships, helicopters, cranes, and lifting equipment both for onshore and offshore operations. The fact that the Ministry will have interaction with commercial ships as well (including the right to inspect fish and caviar poaching boats) as part of its mandate will give the MES interaction with the State Border Service. (Heydarov owns the Caspian Fish Company, which has the monopoly on the legal caviar industry; this arrangement could prove beneficial to his commercial interests).

14. (C) In our analysis, it appears that this new decree has given Minister Heydarov the authority to serve as the operational lead either during large-scale emergencies or when the fault lines between different agencies overlap in lesser operations. Additionally, the "112" hotline appears to support the function of civil defense troops. Azerbaijan has retained the Soviet system of a separate number for medical and police emergencies. These numbers will remain in effect, and we believe the new 112 would be used for emergency rescue in the case of disasters and catastrophes. The Ministry could not be reached for further clarification.

BAKU'S CONSTRUCTION EMERGENCY?

15. (C) In a separate decree issued the same day, President Aliyev abolished the former State Agency for City Planning

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and Architecture, assigned its responsibilities to the MES, and established a new State Committee for Urban Construction and Architecture (SCUCA). The responsibilities for the new SCUCA have not yet been outlined, but we expect it will not be a powerful organization. The former State Agency for City Planning and Architecture reported to the Baku mayor and was a lucrative source of income and power for the mayor during Baku's ongoing construction boom. Recently the mayor and the committee have come under criticism for utter lack of zoning and planning, disregard for safety standards and infrastructure needs, and the high cost of bribes necessary to construct an apartment highrise. For example, two landslides occurred in Baku last year as a result of construction on hillsides without the necessary ground support.

16. (C) While most in Baku would qualify the city's urban planning as a disaster, it appears to be a leap of logic to put construction responsibilities under an emergency management organization. This move probably will be justified under the reasoning that Azerbaijan is in an earthquake zone and as such, the construction of highrises needs to be controlled by scientists and emergency management specialists, not businessmen. Politically, this move undercuts the "Old Guard" Baku mayor's power and transfers that power to a close contact of the President. Given Heydarov's connection to the President and the gradual weakening of the mayor's hand, we expect that the new SCUCA under the mayor's office will simply be a figurehead and the true authority, and thus income, will be held by Heydarov.

HARNISH